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Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information (A/53/21/Rev.1 and A/53/509)

1. **Mr. Skrypko** (Belarus), Rapporteur, introducing the report of the Committee on Information on the work of its twentieth session, said that, following the format of previous years, the report was divided into four chapters, and it contained as annexes the statements by the Chairman of the Committee on Information and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the twentieth session. He briefly reviewed the content of the main parts of the report and said that during its discussions the Committee had welcomed the important commemoration of World Press Freedom Day and had expressed its dedication to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, which were fundamental to democracy and development.

2. Many Committee members had noted the dramatic technological achievements in the field of information and communication in recent years and had referred to the still existing disparities between the developed countries and the developing countries, calling for the elimination of those disparities. The Committee had generally supported the proposals of the Secretary-General to initiate reorientation of the Department of Public Information (DPI), stressing that the Committee should be fully involved in the reform activities and that the views of Member States should be taken into account.

3. The Committee had praised the important work of the United Nations information centres, emphasized their invaluable role in the Organization's global outreach and expressed concern about cutbacks in the resources allocated to them. Regarding the integration of the centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, the Committee had reaffirmed its view that such integration should be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host country.

4. Referring to the potential of new technologies to expand the dissemination capabilities of the United Nations, the Committee had praised DPI for effectively entering cyberspace, especially through the Internet, and for enriching the United Nations home page on the World Wide Web. The important work of the Secretariat in providing all Permanent Missions with access to the Organization's electronic data base had been highly appreciated. The Committee had expressed support for the development of electronic communications, but it had emphasized that DPI should maintain its outreach through the traditional media in order to take the particular needs of the people of the developing countries into account.

5. With respect to the preparation and adoption of the Committee's report to the General Assembly, there had been a change in the working method used. Previously, negotiations on the report had been held in the Bureau of the Committee, together with the representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China. At the twentieth session, in contrast, all members of the Committee had been invited to participate in consultations through an open-ended working group headed by the Chairman, and that procedure would be officially instituted the following year at the twenty-first session of the Committee.

6. At the conclusion of consultations, the Committee had prepared two draft resolutions and a draft decision, which were contained in part IV of the report, and had decided, by consensus, to recommend their adoption to the General Assembly. Draft resolution A, "Information in the service of humanity", was similar to the corresponding resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. Draft resolution B, "United Nations public information policies and activities", reflected ideas that had been put forward in the Committee's debate and spelled out agreed recommendations, which should guide the Department of Public Information in its future work. The draft decision called for an increase in the membership of the Committee from 90 to 93 members and recommended the appointment of Angola, the Republic of Moldova and the Solomon Islands as the new members.

7. Lastly, the Committee had considered the recent report of the Secretary-General on the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity (A/AC.198/1998/4) and had felt that more information was needed in order to evaluate the technical feasibility and programming capacity of a United Nations direct broadcasting system and listeners' interest in such a system. The Secretary-General would provide that information to the Committee at its twenty-first session in 1999.

8. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Secretary-General, in the context of the important reform actions he had initiated, had called for the reorientation of communication and public information activities and had stressed the need to foster a communications culture throughout the Organization. The report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities recommended that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of

strategic management. A communications culture must help people everywhere to realize the relevance of the work of the United Nations to their everyday concerns. The Organization should appear as a transparent institution that responded to major challenges of global significance in all fields, and its messages should find a receptive ear in all parts of the world. Accordingly, it was essential to harness the latest information technology, within the limits of the resources available. In fact, the new technologies should result in dramatic improvements in productivity and continuous improvement in programme delivery. It was important to note that the advances in information technology which were a major focus of the Department's new orientation were not confined to the Internet (the so-called fourth medium of communication) but were also enhancing the effectiveness of the three traditional media: print, radio and television.

9. Development of the use of the Internet had continued during the year; there had already been 77 million accesses to the United Nations Web site from 130 countries. At the end of the current meeting, the Arabic and Chinese home pages would be inaugurated, thus making the service available in all the official languages. The use of the audio and video capacity of the Internet had been initiated in order to facilitate access to United Nations radio and television broadcasts through its Web site. A feasibility study was being conducted on the establishment of a United Nations direct radio broadcasting service. A direct broadcasting pilot project had been developed; its results would be discussed at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information.

10. In addition to using the Internet capacity, the Department had attempted to establish links with news broadcasting agencies. It had collaborated with Deutsche Welle, the BBC World Service and Insight News Television in providing coverage of visits to various United Nations humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. At the same time, cooperation with other partners in the United Nations system, such as UNICEF, UNDP, ILO and UNHCR, continued to be strengthened. Technical advances were also having an impact on the print media; many of the materials currently produced were adapted and posted on the Internet in order to reach a much larger audience. Nonetheless, the demand for print products remained high, particularly in many developing countries. Moreover, computer design technologies had enabled the Department to prepare materials that appeared virtually simultaneously in print and on the Internet.

11. As part of the strategic reorientation, a number of structural changes had been initiated within the Department of Public Information. A Strategic Communications Planning Group had been established. Composed of Division Directors and Chiefs of Service, it met weekly to review all aspects of the Department's activities and policies. The continuous exchange of ideas at the strategic and tactical levels was essential to effective communications policies. In that context, the Secretary-General had appointed a Director of Communications in his own Executive Office, thereby expanding and deepening the exchange between the Office of the Secretary-General and the Department. Moreover, a Media Response Group, responsible for reviewing media reports on the United Nations and providing advice on the most appropriate response, had been established. An outcome of that initiative was the set of fact sheets entitled "Setting the record straight".

12. The Secretary-General had stressed the programmatic nature of the work of the Department of Public Information, as illustrated by the support it provided to the thematic programmes of other Departments. In the area of peace and security, the Organization's most important communications objective was to be able to transmit accurate and timely information about the role of the United Nations in the complex post-cold-war world situation to multiple and diverse audiences. The Organization must make the best possible use of the available resources and distribution networks in order to provide the media and opinion leaders with the necessary material for broad coverage of United Nations efforts to bolster international peace and security. Continuing close cooperation among Departments had been established in order to transmit consistent and balanced messages relating to international peace and security, including disarmament issues.

13. With regard to peacekeeping, communications played a dual role: public information could contribute to both the operational effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping activities and the understanding and appreciation of the Organization's role by a broader international audience. Acceptance by the international community and the mission-area audience was essential to peacekeeping efforts. However, despite its importance in that field, public information was still not adequately resourced and was not integrated in the overall concept of mission operations. Member States must provide full support to the Department in order to remedy that situation.

14. Turning to development and human rights, he said that in 1998 emphasis was being placed on the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the observance of Human Rights Day; the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem; the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International

Criminal Court; the World Youth Forum and the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth; and the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, organized by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs under the auspices of the NGO Committee on Ageing.

15. The priority accorded to development issues had led to increased media coverage of United Nations activities relating to economic and poverty issues. The Department had contributed significantly to ensuring global coverage of the special high-level meetings of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and of the panel discussions on economic development. The increased recognition of the right to development dovetailed with the United Nations human rights programme. In addition, the mainstreaming of issues relating to gender equality and the advancement of women remained a part of the Department's multi-media strategy.

16. The United Nations continued to follow up the major international conferences of the 1990s through five-year reviews and, at the same time, seek new means of ensuring the widespread dissemination of information to the media, non-governmental organizations, universities and the general public. The Department was currently preparing communications strategies and other activities with a view to the five-year reviews of various conferences.

17. One of the most significant aspects of the Department's new orientation was the need for partnerships with various sectors of civil society in order to transmit the message of the United Nations, including the need to strengthen working relations with media representatives, particularly the resident correspondents in the United Nations. He stressed the importance of the Department's coverage of the meetings of the Organization's intergovernmental bodies. The Department would make every effort to maintain its high level of efficiency in the performance of that service.

18. For over half a century, DPI, through its partnership with non-governmental organizations, had been reaching local communities worldwide. By December 1997, 1,547 non-governmental organizations had associate status with the Department. The increase in the number of associated non-governmental organizations showed the ever-increasing interest of such organizations in promoting the work of the Organization. Every week, 200 or so representatives of non-governmental organizations attended the briefings run by the Department. The fifty-first annual DPI/NGO Conference, which had been dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, had taken place at Headquarters from 14 to 16 September 1998; 1,900 representatives of 625 organizations from 60 countries had attended, a record figure. There had been 60 speakers from the United Nations system and various Governments, non-governmental organizations, media and academia.

19. Over the past year, the Department had devoted increased attention to its educational outreach activities by holding workshops for teachers, students' days, a students' conference on human rights for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and teleconferences with over 5,000 schools in the United States of America, Canada and Mexico, in addition to its ongoing guided tours and group programmes. In response to the ever-increasing interest in the work of the United Nations, the Department was preparing a series of more user-friendly publications with information aimed at schools and the public at large. Evidence of the increasing public interest was to be found in the huge numbers of visitors who had taken the guided tour during the spring of 1998. The exhibits and gifts which visitors saw on the tour were in need of repair or out of date and security restrictions caused problems; however, with the generous support of the Better World Fund, the Department was trying to make visits into an educational, pleasant and financially self-sustaining activity.

20. Technological progress had also had major repercussions on the services provided by the Department's Dag Hammarskjöld Library. In response to calls from Member States, a programme to digitalize documents in the microfiche collection had been initiated. Also, the Department was continuing to make every effort to ensure that its publications were timely and relevant to the current needs of its target audiences. To that end it had revised and updated a number of its publications and had compiled special issues on reform, some of which were specifically aimed at the press. Elimination of the backlog of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, which was expected in 1999, would facilitate the production of a CD-ROM containing 50 *Yearbooks*, from 1946 to 1996. Application of modern publishing technology would speed production of future editions. The *United Nations Chronicle*, the Organization's flagship publication, had extended its use of human-interest stories and in-depth articles on specific issues, many written expressly for the magazine by outside dignitaries, leading experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations. At the same time, it remained committed to broad coverage of the regular activities of the entire United Nations system. The quarterly *Africa Recovery* had continued to focus on raising global awareness of

Africa's critical economic situation and of the profound transformation Africa had undergone. It had given coverage to the new, democratic regimes, international efforts to promote economic recovery and development, the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871–S/1998/318), and the main social and economic problems. An extensive report would soon be published on the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which had been held in October 1998.

21. Modernization of graphic design technology would enable the Department to provide more creative, higher-quality design services for Secretariat projects faster and more cost-effectively. The Department's sales and marketing operations had generated an excess of income over expenditure of $1,770,000 for the 1996–1997 biennium and had therefore been the most lucrative of the revenue-producing activities in income section 3.

22. An important objective of the reorientation of public information activities was to strengthen the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country level. In that connection, the United Nations information centres were indispensable tools given that not only did they deliver the United Nations message, they adapted it to the local context; thus, they were not only disseminators of information, they were true communicators. During the past year, the centres' activities had emphasized educational and youth outreach, in cooperation with governmental institutions and the ever-expanding community of non-governmental organizations. In several locations, the business community too had offered its cooperation. As a result of technological progress in communications, most information centres were now electronically connected to Headquarters and to each other, and had instant access to United Nations documents and other reference sources. The number of centres that had developed their own Web sites in local languages continued to increase.

23. In that spirit of global teamwork, a meeting had been held at Headquarters in September 1998 of information centre directors and other information staff from 23 locations around the world. Participants had had an opportunity to hear directly from the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General on their vision of the United Nations and to discuss strategic thinking with other Secretariat officials. The directors had also had the rare opportunity to brief members of the Committee on Information personally on the wide-ranging information work which they were performing on behalf of the United Nations. The directors had given the impression that the centres were running at maximum capacity, with a small number of staff performing multiple tasks and taking full advantage of their local contacts and the new communications technologies and equipment. There had been a consensus amongst the directors that new information technologies were important in increasing the efficiency of their operations. However, they had stressed that the strength of the information centres continued to be their ability to customize information activities according to local public opinion and priority issues and to put a "human face" on the work of the Organization. The directors had also been unanimous in stressing the importance of building a constructive partnership between all members of the United Nations family working in the field and of safeguarding the functional autonomy of the integrated information centres.

24. In both theory and practice, the Department of Public Information stressed reorientation of its substantive activities towards greater sensitivity to the needs of the media, other partners in civil society and Governments. The process had to be gradual, but also deliberate and determined. The goal was a United Nations system permeated with a culture of communications and information.

25. **Ms. Sibal** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) noted that UNESCO was the lead agency in matters dealing with the free flow of information by word and image and the development of the communication capacities of Member States. At the dawn of the new millennium, the mandate of UNESCO in that area had been expanded beyond the traditional media to include informatics. UNESCO promoted the dissemination of information, particularly on the activities of the United Nations system, and worked in close partnership with the Department of Public Information. It was also concerned with strengthening cooperation with and among Member States in the communication field. She noted with satisfaction paragraph 38 of draft resolution B contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/53/21/Rev.1), which acknowledged the important work carried out by UNESCO, and reaffirmed that UNESCO would continue to make every effort to fulfil its mandate.

26. UNESCO currently managed more than 300 communication projects, representing a budget of over $40 million, financed mainly from contributions by donor countries, the agencies and funds of the United Nations system or the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), created in 1980 to identify the needs of developing countries in that field, assist them in developing technical and human resources and promote the transfer of technology. Recently, the IPDC Bureau had reviewed another 80 proposals and approved new projects representing $2.5 million for presentation to the Council.

Since its establishment, IPDC had distributed US$ 77 million to some 700 projects in more than 100 countries.

27. One of the main criteria established by IPDC for evaluating proposals was the support which projects gave to independent and pluralistic media; that had led to the strengthening of funds for communications projects. In fact, new projects on the media and communication for good government and human rights, representing more than $7 million were being approved. UNESCO believed that communication, particularly, independent, pluralistic and free media, contributed to democracy and development. Its communication strategy was aimed at encouraging a free flow of information at the international and national levels; promoting a wider and more balanced dissemination of information, without any obstacle to freedom of expression; and strengthening the capacities of the developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process. Those aspects formed the social and political basis of human development and of grass-roots participation in the development process.

28. With regard to teamwork with the United Nations system, UNESCO would participate in the television forum to be held the following week and in the follow-up activities thereto. It had also participated in the new communications group and the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) and had served as moderator of a panel on human rights education held within the framework of the annual conference of non-governmental organizations and the Department of Public Information.

29. UNESCO played a vital role in the round tables of the specialized agencies on communication for development, which constituted an informal mechanism for consultation, the sharing of ideas and experience and the organization of joint action. The specialized agencies should seek innovative ways of communicating ideas that reinforced democratic processes and spurred development initiatives; utilizing communication networks, particularly radio and electronic networks, to increase public access to information and facilitate free and fair participation in decision-making processes; and enhancing participation by people at the grass roots level, who were the hardest hit by poverty. UNESCO would continue its active participation in the round tables and would attempt to increase its operational work in field projects aimed at promoting social and economic well-being, strengthening democracy and good government, combating AIDS and other epidemics and improving and facilitating humanitarian services.

30. UNESCO welcomed the ongoing discussions on the feasibility of establishing a United Nations radio network and it looked forward to being able to participate in programming and to working with Member States to promote cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity, through communication through the development of endogenous media capacities, particularly radio broadcasting at the community, national and regional levels.

31. Steps must be taken to ensure respect for multilingualism in the information society so that each individual might benefit to the fullest from the opportunities offered by new technology. The Info-Ethics'98 Congress, recently held in Monaco had been an occasion to discuss the ethical, legal and societal challenges of cyberspace, which were of particular interest to UNESCO. The Congress had provided a unique opportunity for UNESCO to express its views on linguistic diversity and to make strong statements on the need to provide the information society with a transnational political and ethical structure and for Member States to unite their efforts for the benefit of humankind. UNESCO had proposed the following objectives: (a) promoting and defending freedom of expression and the protection of privacy in cyberspace as well as in the traditional media; (b) promoting and extending the public domain of information (free access to governmental information and to the national cultural heritages of the entire world); (c) promoting cultural diversity and multilingualism in cyberspace; and (d) promoting education and training in order to ensure that everyone could use the tools and methods of the media and cyberspace.

32. On 18 and 19 January 1999, UNESCO would convene at its headquarters a meeting of non-governmental organizations, well-known personalities, institutions and experts participating in the fight against paedophilia, child pornography and child prostitution in the media and on the Internet with a view to formulating a common and global plan of action against those crimes and establishing a well-structured network of the groups working in that area. With regard to the response of UNESCO to important General Assembly decisions, its Director-General had submitted to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) an outline of a strategy for communicating to the international media initiatives relating to the International Year and International Decade for the Culture of Peace. Without the participation of Member States that strategy would be meaningless.

33. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that technological advances in the field of information and communications were linking nations, together as never before, and that would have tremendous potential for resolving some of the most critical problems facing humankind. Furthermore, the post-cold-war

era offered unprecedented opportunities for strengthening multilateral cooperation in that crucial field. Nonetheless, persistent disparities between developed and developing countries undermined the capacity of the developing countries to make full use of information and communications technologies. In that context, the mandate of the Committee on Information, set out in General Assembly resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, remained as relevant now as it had been the day it was adopted. In that connection, the need to ensure impartiality and balance in the information flow and to strengthen the information and communication infrastructure and the capacity of the developing countries in that field through the transfer of advanced information technology and the expansion of their access to information was more imperative than ever before.

34. The Group of 77 and China stressed the importance of South-South cooperation in the field of information and communication, based on the principle of collective self-reliance. Such cooperation could be enhanced through the sharing of development experiences, the transfer of technology and the harnessing of latent synergies and complementarities between the developing countries. Likewise, North-South cooperation needed to be developed on the basis of genuine partnership in order for the developing countries to overcome technical, financial and other difficulties and to become equal partners in the age of information and communication.

35. The Group of 77 and China commended the work of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) of UNESCO, an important instrument for the implementation of the UNESCO strategy for communication in the service of humanity, based on international cooperation, and for the global development of communication and information in general, of the corresponding infrastructure and of the capacity of the developing countries in that field.

36. On the current international scene, overwhelmed by an information revolution, the media must disseminate objective and impartial information, taking into account the unique social and cultural traditions of each region and acting with a sense of professionalism, ethics and responsibility. In a changing world order, the successful fulfilment of the DPI mandate was crucial, including the mobilization of global opinion in support of the goals and objectives of the United Nations and coverage of the critical questions before the Organization. With regard to paragraph 30 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/509), it was of particular importance to the developing countries that the United Nations should redouble its efforts to enhance the traditional media; in that context, it was necessary to accord equal respect to all the official languages of the United Nations.

37. Referring to paragraph 8 of the report, concerning the Internet, he stressed that the United Nations home page and all its sites on the Internet were, in essence, a publication. They should therefore be regarded on the same basis as other publications and should contain comprehensive, objective and balanced information on all issues before the Organization. It was also necessary to ensure editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly.

38. The Group of 77 and China took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity (A/AC.198/1998/4) and trusted that account would be taken of the views expressed during the deliberations of the Committee on Information, including the importance attached to those initiatives and that of maintaining existing radio programmes, respecting the linguistic diversity of the membership of the Organization and providing the widest possible geographical coverage.

39. As for the United Nations information centres, the Group of 77 and China noted with concern the problems posed by some instances of integration in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and believed that a reappraisal was necessary in order to remedy those situations. It was essential to preserve the independence, maintain the effectiveness and strengthen the work of the information centres. It should be recalled that the General Assembly had stressed in various resolutions that the process of integration should be implemented on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country. At the same time, the views of Member States should be considered in elaborating proposals for the restructuring of the centres and the establishment of regional hubs. It was essential to continue allocating the necessary resources to the centres in order to ensure their effective functioning, particularly in the developing countries. In that connection, the Group of 77 and China looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the review of earlier cases of integration of the centres, called for in paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, which would be considered at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information.

40. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that public information played a crucial role in the work of the Organization, particularly in the context of the ongoing reform process at the United Nations, and that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of

Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With regard to the reform of the United Nations, he referred to the restructuring of the Department of Public Information and the redefining of its objectives with a view to making the global audience fully aware of the work of the Organization. His delegation had supported the Secretary-General's initiative in that regard, on the understanding that public information activities would form part of the substantive programmes of the Organization, and that, as a cross-cutting issue, they would be integrated in all United Nations activities. It was to be hoped that, as a result of the initiative, information on the objectives and activities of the Organization relating to such vital issues as peace, development and justice would be widely disseminated.

41. In order to achieve the objective of establishing a just and effective global information system, the Department of Public Information should not only promote the regular activities of the United Nations but also act as the forerunner of an information system in which all Member States would have the same opportunities to participate. In that context, the Department should focus its attention on publicizing the activities of the Organization in areas that were related to and affected the lives of common people; in other words, it should accord priority to issues relating to social, economic and human development. Furthermore, press releases issued by the Department must reflect objectively the deliberations in the various forums of the United Nations, particularly on development-related issues. In that connection, he expressed disappointment at the recent instances of insufficient coverage of issues of importance to the developing countries and requested the competent Department unit to show greater sensitivity in that regard.

42. His delegation praised the work of the section responsible for the United Nations site on the World Wide Web and supported the expansion and upgrading of the Optical Disk System and the idea of charging a fee to outside users.

43. His delegation was pleased to contribute constructively, in both the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Fifth Committee, to the process of establishing a new description of the functions of the Department of Information under the medium-term plan and hoped that that description, which would establish broad parameters for the activities of the Department in the coming years, would be approved shortly.

44. The United Nations information centres were the real interface of the Organization with the global community. Their independence and effectiveness should therefore be maintained and, where necessary, strengthened. Unfortunately, the opposite trend had been observed in recent years. A number of centres, including the one in Bangladesh, had been integrated in the UNDP office in the name of efficiency and integrated management objectives which, in most cases, had not been achieved. That process had not only reduced the efficiency of the Dhaka Centre, and many others in the developing countries, but also effectively isolated the Centre from its targeted audience and prevented it from fulfilling its intended purpose. His delegation had repeatedly brought that issue to the attention of the competent authorities and had requested the Secretary-General to review the process of integration with a view to making an objective assessment of the need for each centre and its capacity to deliver mandated programmes and activities. In that connection, he wished to mention paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220, which requested the Secretary-General to carry out such review and formulate relevant recommendations, taking into account the views of the host country. His delegation hoped that, during the current session, a specific time-frame for the review would be set.

45. With regard to the recommendation concerning regional information hubs, his delegation was pleased to offer its services in the establishment of a regional hub in Dhaka and would be participating in the deliberations leading to the adoption of a decision in that regard.

46. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said that she agreed with the conceptual framework proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/53/509) and welcomed the measures taken to reform the Department of Public Information. In that regard, she commended the Department's work in providing sources of electronic information, such as the United Nations Website, and hoped that the new media segment would facilitate the dissemination of information. She also welcomed and supported the efforts of the Ad hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics to upgrade the information capacity of the United Nations together with the capacity of Member States, whose missions participated actively in the Organization's information activities.

47. Unfortunately, technology brought not only benefits but also difficulties, such as the year 2000 problem. Her Government was deeply concerned about that problem and had begun to take measures to avoid its consequences, not only in its own territory, but also within the framework of information links with the world economic system. The Government had established a national agency on informatics which coordinated Government measures to resolve the year 2000 problem; in that regard, priority was being given to the most important branches of the economy.

48. She agreed that the United Nations needed to enhance its radio broadcasting capacity and suggested that pilot radio broadcasts for selected regions in Africa and Europe could yield promising results. The results of such broadcasts would demonstrate the technical feasibility and programming capacity of the United Nations and would determine the interest of listeners in United Nations broadcasting programmes. Moreover, radio broadcasting programmes should be included in the prior planning process for United Nations peacekeeping operations.

49. Her delegation welcomed the fact that the Department of Public Information continued to strengthen its links with non-governmental organizations. It welcomed the Department's efforts to coordinate a number of events and programmes, such as World Press Freedom Day, organized by the Department in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA) and the World Press Freedom Committee. The United Nations was obviously doing its utmost to reorient its public information activities in order to mobilize public support and create a new, positive image of the Organization.

50. She regretted that, even as the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being celebrated, journalists continued to be attacked in violation of article 19 of the Declaration, which proclaimed the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. That was why her delegation continued to attach great importance to the adoption of the necessary measures to protect journalists, especially those covering situations in areas of conflict and in regions affected by social and military tension. As its contribution to press freedom in the world, her delegation had submitted to the Committee on Information a draft resolution on the protection of journalists discharging their professional duties in areas of armed conflict. It hoped that the item would be included in the agenda of the next session of the Committee on Information, to be held in May 1999.

51. **Mr. Stagg** (Panama) said that, after many years of deadlock, the agreement reached by the members of the Committee on Information on the establishment of a working group would permit the adoption of more transparent negotiation mechanisms in order to begin the consideration of substantive aspects of that body's mandate.

52. While the Rio Group commended the establishment of a direct United Nations broadcasting service, it believed that the operation of such a service should not result in reduced resources for the current United Nations Radio service. The Rio Group countries benefited from the United Nations Radio through short programmes in Spanish and Portuguese that met the requirement of informing the public about what was happening in the United Nations. Such activities should continue and any new initiative should take into account the linguistic diversity of the United Nations and have programmes covering all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The countries of the Rio Group were prepared to contribute their views on any initiatives concerning the dissemination of their activities.

53. The Rio Group gave priority to the functional independence and operational capacity of the United Nations information centres in its member countries, wished to reiterate its position with respect to the integration of such centres with other bodies of the United Nations system and hoped that full use would be made of their potential.

54. **Mr. Al-Romaithi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Department played an important role in the promotion of understanding among peoples and the development of economic and human resources. While modern communications media had helped to disseminate topics of world interest, they had caused the poorest countries that did not have modern technology to be marginalized from the development process. Therefore, international efforts to bridge the gap between developing and developed countries should be intensified through the implementation of an information strategy on aspects of globalization relating to social justice and the understanding among peoples that strengthened assistance to developing countries, vulnerable population groups and the victims of armed conflicts, human rights violations and natural disasters.

55. His delegation, convinced of the need to establish a broader and balanced world information system that restricted the hegemony of developed countries, rejected the attempts to discriminate against certain Islamic States and third world countries and the media campaigns against them. For that reason, a code of conduct in the field of information should be instituted in order to ensure respect for cultural diversity and guarantee the transparency and objectivity of information.

56. Given the fact that information also had to broaden culture and human knowledge in addition to promoting economic and cultural development, his Government had begun to update the country's laws on information technology and communications and had carried out a number of local surveys. Freedom of the press was respected in his country, which encouraged innovative intellectual thinking.

57. He supported all proposals aimed at the reorientation and strengthening of the activities of the Department and United Nations Information centres. He also supported the activities being carried out in coordination and cooperation with other bodies to highlight the economic problems of developing countries and to promote the understanding of the goals of disarmament, peace, development, humanitarian affairs and the environment. Sufficient resources should be made available to provide more information on, and heighten the world's awareness of, the question of Palestine and other questions relating to international peace and security.

58. He welcomed the recommendations of the Committee on Information at its recent session to reduce the differences between developing and developed countries and to promote peace and security, the development of natural and human resources, and sustainable development. In that regard, he urged all countries to increase cooperation in the dissemination of information in order to promote understanding and harmony among all peoples of the world.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.